

M I C H I G A N

Carl Levin

UNITED STATES SENATOR

**Statement of Ms. Cassandra Woods
State Director for Senator Carl Levin
Michigan State House Judiciary Committee Hearing
On Embryonic Stem Cell Research
Wednesday, November 7, 2007
Lansing, MI**

Good morning. I am Cassandra Woods, Senator Carl Levin's State Director. Senator Levin couldn't be here this morning, and asked me to share with you his views on the issue of embryonic stem cell research.

Senator Levin first wants to thank all of the members of the House Judiciary Committee for holding this hearing. It demonstrates that you are genuinely interested in considering this issue. It is his hope that in learning more, you will take action to change the way Michigan addresses the issue of stem cell research.

On April 11, 2007, Senator Levin spoke on the Senate floor during the debate on the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2007 passed by the Congress earlier this year, but vetoed by President Bush. His statement clearly illustrates his support for embryonic stem cell research and its promise for the future.

Senator Levin believes that this potentially life-giving research is supported by a clear majority of the American people. Embryonic stem cell research could hold the key to curing diseases that no other research could cure. In his July 17, 2006 floor statement Senator Levin again states his belief about the potential of embryonic stem cell research. "I believe that embryonic stem cell research is truly a life-giving, not a life-destroying, process because of the extraordinary potential for healing living, breathing human beings who have names, faces, and loved ones."

The list of diseases that could benefit from stem cell research includes Alzheimer's disease, Lou Gehrig's disease, juvenile diabetes, spinal cord injuries and many others. Stem cell research could offer the millions of Americans suffering from these diseases not just hope, but cures. Supporters of stem cell research understand that these breakthroughs will not be easy or inevitable. But our current national policy makes them far less likely because the federal government will only fund embryonic stem cell research on stem cell lines created before August 21, 2001. Most independent experts estimated that the 80 stem cell lines available for federal research at that time were woefully inadequate. And most of those lines were later determined to be polluted and unusable, leaving only about 20 stem cell lines available.

Senator Levin referred to the testimony of Dr. Zerhouni, Director of the National Institutes of Health, before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. Dr. Zerhouni stated: ".....these cell lines will not be sufficient to do all the research we need to do...these cell lines have exhibited instability from the genetic standpoint and it's not possible for me to see how we can continue the momentum of science in stem cell research with the cell lines that we have currently at NIH that can be funded. It is clear today that American science would be better served and the nation would be better served if we let our scientists have access to more cell lines."

While the administration objects to using embryos for research, Senator Levin pointed out that the key fact is that any embryo not used for stem cell research is going to be destroyed anyway. The embryos created by fertilization clinics that are not going to be used for implantation will be destroyed.. "Why," Senator Levin asked, "not give them a life-giving use?"

The 2003 study conducted by Rand Health found that there were approximately 400,000 embryos in storage in the United States, and some of these embryos will never be used because parents either had a successful pregnancy and no longer needed them, or because treatments were unsuccessful. The study additionally found that only 2 percent of these embryos will be used to create pregnancies in unrelated mothers. Many will be discarded.

Current federal law does not prevent the destruction of unused embryos, but will not permit those embryos to be used to try to help people with seriously debilitating diseases. Embryonic stem cell research is truly a life-giving process because of the extraordinary potential for healing living, breathing human beings, human beings with names, faces and families.

Senator Levin believes that embryonic stem cell research holds enormous promise for healing and saving individuals who suffer from debilitating diseases and injuries. He has stated that, "It is our responsibility to pursue those cures and treatments in an ethical manner. In order for our scientists to do quality research and make advances in medicine, they must have access to embryonic stem cells that are uncontaminated and viable for research, especially since they will otherwise be destroyed."

Senator Levin feels just as strongly about Michigan's restrictive laws on stem cell research and believes that the current ban on this kind of research should be lifted. If Michigan's ban is not removed now, our universities which have created state-of-the-art life sciences facilities will fall to second class status, unable to retain or attract world class scientists. The loss to the State could be irrevocable.

Senator Levin urges you to fight to open the doors to the promise of embryonic stem cell research. He hopes very much that you will pick up the gauntlet to ensure that Michigan has the opportunity to play a positive and integral role in this critical and promising area of research.